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ABSTRACT

The controversy surrounding the Chinese film "Pioneers" is analyzed and presented as a case study of a film caught in the recent two-line struggle in literature and art in the People's Republic of China. Within the history of the arts in China, there has been a difference of opinion between those in favor of the continued portrayal of bourgeois themes and those who believe in the exclusive depiction of the struggles of the worker. Those two opposing views have come to be called the two-line struggle in literature and art. "Pioneers" is a feature length film documenting the successful establishment of a model revolutionary industrial community near Siberia. It was filmed in the early 1970s at the suggestion of Premier Chou En-lai. However, upon its completion in 1975, its release was banned by Chiang Ch'ing, Mao's wife, whom he had made overseer of all fine arts productions. She condemned the film for glorifying the achievements of specific individuals. Mao disagreed with her decision, but she persisted in keeping the film and its producers under surveillance. Since the arrest of Chiang Ch'ing in October 1976, Mao's successor has allowed the film to be released. Perhaps this indicates his support of Chou En-lai and Mao or perhaps he sees no serious errors in revolutionary thought in the film's content. (Author/AV)

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PIONEERS: A CASE STUDY OF A FILM CAUGHT IN THE TWO LINE STRUGGLE IN LITERATURE AND ART IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

BY
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PREFACE

The death of Chairman Mao Tse-tung in September 1976 marked the passing of one of the monumental political leaders of the twentieth century. Under the leadership of Chairman Hua Kuo-feug and the Chinese Communist Party China has embarked upon a movement to build the nation into a powerful socialist state by the end of this century, and is now in the midst of a campaign to criticize the so-called "Gang of Four", Chiang Ch'ing, Mao Tse-tung's widow and three other senior leaders--Tao Wen-yuan, Wang Hung-wen, and Chang Ch'un-ch'iao-- who have been labeled enemies of the Party and the State.

The "Gang of Four" have been charged with a long list of "crimes" against the state. Some of the alleged "crimes" are associated with the two-line struggle, between capitalism and socialism, in the field of literature and art. Linda Morrison, a secondary social studies teacher, analyzes the controversy surrounding the film "Pioneers" (which depicts the successful establishment of the model revolutionary industrial community at Taching) and presents it as a case study of a film caught in the recent two-line struggle in literature and art in the People's Republic of China. Originally released in 1975, "Pioneers" was severely criticized and subsequently banned by Chiang Ching, and has now been re-released as part of the campaign against the "Gang of Four."

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INTRODUCTION

Recent articles in Newsweek and The New York Times have cited Peking People's Daily as proclaiming a "new spring in proletarian literature and art,"[1] with Chinese officials quoting Mao Tse-tung's statement of the 1950's to"let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools of thought contend."[2] This new outlook toward China's art and literature closely follows the arrest and denunciation of Chiang Ch'ing and three of her followers known as "The Gang of Four." The re-release of this film reflects a radical change in the Chinese political outlook.

The widow of Mao had been placed by him in the position of overseer of the arts since the cultural revolution of the late 1960's. Supposedly she was adhering to Mao's guidelines in seeing to it that literature and art serve the revolution. Yet in her position Chiang exercised a virtual dictatorship in deciding which cultural productions might be shown. Many presentations were banned, with artists severely restricted and/or punished. The feature movie Pioneers is one example of this.

This investigation will first review the two line struggle in literature and art and then review the events surrounding the film Pioneers. A short background on Tachning has been included to further reader understanding of the topic of the film.

TWO LINE STRUGGLE ON LITERATURE AND ART

Within the history of the arts in the People's Republic of China, there has been a difference of opinion between those in favor of the continued portrayal of bourgeois themes and those who believe in the exclusive depiction of the struggles of the worker. Those two opposing views have come to be called the "two line struggle in literature and art."

Article 12 of "The Constitution of the People's Republic of China" clearly states the official position on who controls literature and art in the PRC, and its role in achieving socialist revolution. It States: "The proletarian must exercise all-round dictatorship over the bourgeois in the super-structure, including all spheres of culture. Culture and education, literature and art, physical education, health work and scientific research work must all serve proletarian politics, serve the workers, peasants, and soldiers and be combined with productive labor."[3]

The place of art in Communist society and guidelines for the artist were outlined in the 1942 Yenan Forum of Literature and Art. Every artist, according to Mao, takes up a class position:

> In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics. Proletarian literature and art are part

> the whole proletarian revolutionary cause: they are, as Lenin said, cogs and wheels in the whole revolutionary machine.[4]

The interpretation of how this struggle should be presented varied between artists. Some favored continued portrayal in their presentations of Old China, rich vs. poor, as well as of dragons, princesses, etc. The opposition to this group, lead by Mao, felt this was counter productive to achieving socialist revolution. Mao saw literature and art as an important vehicle, as follows:

> "(Our purpose is) to ensure that literature and art fit well into the whole revolutionary machine as a component part, that they operate as powerful weapons for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and destroying the enemy with one heart and one mind."[5]

In 1963 and 1964 Mao issued statements expressing his dissatisfaction with the progress of the transformation of proletarian art, later called his "two directives on literature and art"; Mao said: "Problems abound in all forms of art such as the drama, ballads, music, the fine arts, the dance, the cinema, poetry and literature, and the people involved are numerous. In many departments very little has been achieved so far in socialist transformation. The 'dead' still dominate in many departments."[6]

By the mid 1960's the political situation led to the Cultural Revolution, closing down theaters and entertainment centers throughout the country. One of the things which had

greatly disturbed Mao was the continued portrayal of the bourgeois themes. As Mao's power base was greatly strengthened by the revolution, he appointed his wife Chiang Ch'ing to the position of overseer of the arts. She actively involved herself in all aspects of production but particularly, according to Time Magazine, "as a chief critic of bourgeois plays and movies."[7] She continued in the position until her arrest in October 1976.

For the past six months, Chairman Hua has loosened many of the restrictions Chiang had placed on the arts. Many films and shows banned by Chiang have reopened. Pioneers is one example of a proletarian movie which attempted to follow the guidelines as set by Mao which was banned under Chiang and recently re-released following her arrest. What is there to learn from Taching in industry or why make a feature movie about an oilfield? Newsday editor David Laventhol, a member of the first group of Americans to visit Taching in July, 1975 wrote:

> "Using self reliance and taking the initiative in their own hands, a small group of workers overcame climatic and technological hazards to find oil after the Soviet Union cut off supplies in 1960."[8]

Located 200 miles from the Siberian border in Northwest China, the area is icebound five months a year. In the spring of 1960, the 1205 drilling team, lead by Comrade Wang Chi Hsi arrived at the still snow-covered site. Within a year they found oil and renamed the area Taching, meaning

great celebration. By 1963, due to the hard work of this group and of others who had joined them, China had become self sufficient in oil. Comrade Wang has become a revolutionary hero. A description of Taching of today by Laventhol:

> "Taching. . .is a prototype of the new China, a self-sufficient society in an area where agriculture provides enough food to meet the needs of industrial workers; where large and small industry exist side by side; where living areas are scattered in clusters rather than together on one city; and where traditional barriers between city and country workers and between male and female workers are broken down.
>
> More than 400,000 people now live in Taching."9

As can be seen in the aforementioned, Taching is revolutionary in many ways. It is also a model of the reliance of the community upon Mao Tse-tung's thought. In Laventhol's article there are references to Comrade Wang carrying his copy of Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung as the group first arrived in the area and his frequently quoting from it. In an article in Red Flag about Pioneers, certain scenes emphasizing this reliance are cited.

"Those who have seen the film will not forget the impressive scene showing the joy of the workers upon the arrival of Chairman Mao's "On Contradiction" and "On Practice" sent by the Party Central Committee headed by Chairman Mao. Another scene shows Chou Ting-Shan, his eyes filled with tears of gratitude, studying Chairman Mao's works avidly. 'Chairman Mao's works are the guarantee for our success."10

Tachning, for its overcoming the obstacles of nature; for reducing China's dependence on foreign sources of energy, and for its reliance upon Mao Tse-tung's thought was selected by Premier Chou En-lai in the early 1970's as the subject of a proletarian feature movie.

THE FILM PIONEERS

The film Pioneers was produced by the Changchun Film Studio in the early 1970's under the direction of Premier Chou En-lai. Chairman Mao had indicated the correct orientation of literature and art must be to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers. According to the NCNA from Peking of November 6, 1976 the film:

> "had the support and cooperation of the party committee, workers, engineers, technicians and cadres of the Tachning oilfield and the support of the departments concerned of the petroleum industry as well as of the Chinese People's Liberation Army."[11]

To ensure a true-to-life portrayal as well as to be made in an appropriate manner writes:

> ". . .In order to do their job well, the screen writers went to the oilfield and conducted wide investigations among the oil workers, eating, living and working alongside them. . ."[12]

The film documents the story of the struggle to open the oilfield under the guidance of Mao's proletarian revolutionary line. It was designed "to heighten the Chinese people's will to fight and deflate the arrogance of imperialism, revisionism and reaction."[13] When the film had been completed in January of 1975, Chiang Ch'ing refused

to preview it and prohibited the showing of it at the Fourth National Viewing People's Congress. On her own request in February, 1975, she is reported as having said, "this film has serious errors. Whom are you glorifying and to whom singing praises?"14 The same source claims that her attack was aimed against Premier Chou En-lai. At this time, (February, 1975) Pioneers was shown in different parts of the country during the Spring Festival. After viewing the film, Chiang banned the making of additional copies of the film and its distribution abroad. She issued a list of criticisms on Pioneers ("Ten Accusations") some of which include:

> ". . .it was guilty of 'prettifying Liu-Shao-chi, Po Yi-Po and their ilk'* and blamed it for giving special publicity to persons in real life and causing an endless stream of evil consequences. ".if more films of this kind are produced, revisionism will emerge.'"15

Chiang's negative perception of Pioneers apparently was not shared by the workers, peasants and soldiers, who according to Peking sources had seen the early previews. The head scenarist wrote Chairman Mao defending the film. After considering the problem, Mao stepped into the controversy by issuing a directive to Chiang Ch'ing written on July 25, 1975, stating:

> "There is no big error in this film. Suggest that it be approved for distribution. Don't nitpick and to list as many as ten accusations against it is going too far. It hampers the adjustment of the party's current policy on literature and art."16

Despite this directive, Chiang continued her campaign against Pioneers. She ordered the Taching Film Team to break up and had the Changchun Studio put under surveillance.

During the National Conference on learning from Taichai, in September 1975, Chiang Ch'ing called in for a meeting leading members of the Kirin Provincial Party Committee, the Changchun Film Studio Party Committee and the principal scenarist who had written to Mao. She ordered the scenarists of Pioneers to write a letter to Mao:

> "1. Admitting that the first letter to Chairman Mao presented a false picture of the situation,
> 2. Proposing to Chairman Mao that the film Pioneers be withheld from distribution abroad, and
> 3. Requesting to shoot a new version of Pioneers."[17]

The scenarist refused to write the second letter. In addition to this, the same article alleges that Chiang then prohibited press coverage of the film and the Changchun Studio which had made it.[18]

Despite the ban imposed by Chiang, the scenario of Pioneers was printed in the journal Liberation Army Literature and Art in its October 1975 issue.

An investigation headed by Chiang in February 1976 was directed at the members of this journal.

The bans on Pioneers remained in effect through September 1976. In September 1976, Chairman Mao died and shortly afterwards he was succeeded in office by Hua Kuo-feng. In October, Chiang along with three others were arrested by

Chairman Hua allegedly for attempting to seize power. Since then Chairman Hua has re-released many of the works banned by Chiang, including Pioneers.

The possible reasons why Pioneers is again being shown are numerous, though no single explanation stands alone. A personal theory in the case of this film is that in reversing Chiang's ban Chairman Hua re-elevates the posthumous position of Premier Chou En-lai in the minds of China's people while continuing to show his support for Chairman Mao by upholding the July 25, 1975 directive. Another explanation of why Pioneers has been re-released can be in erred from a recent article in What's Happening on the Chinese Mainland;[19] in which the author contends that Hua's government will "inevitably adopt a cultural and educational line which is irreconcilable with the one promoted after the "cultural revolution." Thus, in so doing Chairman Hua's "new spring" may simply be a play to consolidate his power base. Finally, it may be that in the case of Pioneers, Chairman Hua, like his predecessor Chairman Mao, saw no serious errors in revolutionary thought in the film Pioneers.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Sydney Liu, Richard M. Smith and Fay Willey, "The Chinese Hit Parade," Newsweek, (Jan. 17, 1977), p. 34.

[2]Fox Butterfield, "Change in Chinese Music and Art Reflect Upheavals in its Politics," New York Times, (March 28, 1977). p. 8.

[3]"The Constitution of The People's Republic of China," Toward A New World Outlook, p. 319.

[4]"Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art." Selected Works, (1967), Vol III, p. 86.

[5]Ibid., p. 72.

[6]Chiang Ten, "Two Line Struggle on Literary and Art Front," Kuang-Ming Jih-Pao, (March 24, 1976).

[7]Roxane Witke, "Comrade Chiang Ch'ing Tells Her Story," Time, (March 21, 1977), p. 56.

[8]David Laventhol, "Vanguard of The New Society, "China Now, Newsday Special Reprint, (July, 1975), p. 6R.

[9]Ibid., 6R

[10]Hung Kuang-Szu, "What does the attempt of the 'Gang of Four' to suppress the film Pioneers show?" Red Flag No. 11, (Nov., 1976), CMP SPRCP 76-37, p. 39.

[11]"Changchun Film Studio Exposes Crimes of 'Gang of Four' in Opposing Chairman Mao," People's Daily, (Nov. 6, 1976). p. 96.

[12]Ibid., p. 96.

[13]Ibid., p. 97.

[14]Ibid., p. 97

[15]Ibid., p. 97

[16]Jen Ping, "A Brilliant, Historic Document, "People's Daily, (Nov. 5. 1976), CMP-SPRCP-76-46, p. 92.

[17]"Changchun Film Studio" op. cit., p. 99.

[18]Ibid., p. 99.

[19]"Educational Trends After the Fall of the 'Gang of Four'," What's Happening on the Chinese Mainland, Vol. 4, No. 5, (March 15, 1977), p. 1

*Note Po Yi-Po and ilk means reversing the Cultural Revolution.

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Ibid., 76-13, (April 2, 1976).

Ibid., 76-16, (April 22, 1976).

Ibid., 76-37, (November, 1976).

Ibid., 76-46, (November, 1976).